



U.S.
Parents
Involved in
Education

USPIE

EMPOWERING PARENTS

**Are Government
Schools Redeemable?**

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to fix government schools, with many
state governors leading the way.**

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But progress is slow.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Government schools have failed most students by every key metric: reading and math, critical thinking, attendance, physical and mental health, and return on taxpayers' investments. The [Mood of the Nation](#) survey, published February 5, 2025, found that 73% of 1,005 adult respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of public education in the U.S. It is the highest dissatisfaction rate since the survey began in 2001.

Some organizations are attempting to fix government schools, with many state governors leading the way. Perhaps it is worthwhile, considering even with the significant declines over the last few years, 83.7% of American children still attend government schools. But progress is slow. Clear evidence of success is not yet visible. Many parents are unwilling to wait, pulling their kids out of government schools to home-school or send them to private schools. [Home and private school enrollment](#) now accounts for 16.3% of American K-12 students.

U.S. Parents Involved in Education (USPIE) is exploring the big question: Are government schools REDEEMABLE? In this report, USPIE focuses on five key issues, covering history and relevant roadblocks:

- 1. Government Involvement**
- 2. Colleges of Education**
- 3. Teacher Certification**
- 4. Standards and Assessments**
- 5. Teacher Unions**

USPIE believes the totality of these issues is insurmountable. Government schools cannot be saved, at least not in the near future, even with a concerted effort. Nonetheless, suggestions for improvement and correction are provided for those determined to try.

Parents are the first, best educators of their children. This is not just a slogan, not just a throw-away campaign line. It is a fundamental law. Elected officials must embrace this truth, resist the temptation to govern education, and return control to the parents who are the only people properly positioned to hold educators and the education system accountable.

This document offers constructive suggestions that, if implemented with fidelity, provide a means to begin the long journey to improve government schools while retaining a healthy, independent alternative in the free market.

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ISSUE 1: GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT



The Founding Fathers identified no constitutional role for government in education. In their day, most children were homeschooled or attended private or church-based schools. Everyone agreed education was important, but concluded the government should not be involved.

In the 1800s, advocates for universal government schools began exploiting religious tensions and the rise in immigrants. Unitarians debated with Calvinists, and Protestants worried that Catholics might not properly educate their children. Increasingly, schooling came to be seen as less about enlightening children than teaching compliance with national values and protecting society.

At the time, there were no standardized tests to compare student achievement. But in 1787, Thomas Jefferson noted that only in America were there farmers who could read Homer. In 1812, French immigrant Pierre du Pont (whose descendants founded the Du Pont fortune) observed similarly, “Most young Americans, therefore, can read, write and cipher.” Twenty years later, another Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, brought further confirmation, writing about the well-educated American public.

Despite this success, in the 1840s, the iconoclast and then Massachusetts’ Secretary of Education, Horace Mann, advocated for universal government schools, the establishment of teacher colleges, and the benefits of standardization. Mann embraced the Prussian model, which employed only women as teachers. It also held that education could reduce, and perhaps even erase, human failings and compensate for biological flaws.

Gradually, Mann’s vision of taxpayer-funded, government-run schools caught on. In 1867, Andrew Johnson established a national education department (a precursor of the modern Department of Education); every president since has signed into law education-related policies and programs. Yet despite ballooning federal intervention and funding, achievement in government schools remains stunted.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. This report bolstered the notion that American schools were failing, and touched off a wave of local, state and federal reform efforts.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the currently favored metric for achievement, shows no significant improvement in outcomes over the last 40 years. Efforts to improve outcomes for low-income children have also been costly and fruitless. The recent [2024 NAEP](#) scores provide a troubling picture of academic performance in U.S. schools. In reading, only 31% of fourth-grade students and 30% of eighth-grade students performed at or above grade level. Math scores were similarly low, with just 39% of fourth graders and 28% of eighth graders meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations. These results underscore the urgent need for effective educational reform.

The evidence is inarguable: the federal government’s intervention in education has been expensive and disastrous for children. The model of government-run schools has not served our country well and should be abandoned.

I S S U E 2 :

TEACHERS AND COLLEGES OF EDUCATION



For over 50 years, government schools have been dumbing down teacher preparation; teachers in training are now ignorant of successful pedagogies. Instead, they are studying techniques that impede learning and condition children into political activism.

How smart are our teachers? In [a study](#), Researcher Jonathan Waito concluded:

“These data show that US students who choose to major in education, essentially the bulk of people who become teachers, have for at least the last seven decades, been selected from students at the lower end of the academic aptitude pool.”

His study was quite robust, comparing many degree programs over more than 70 years:

“In order to explore this, I used five different measures of US students’ academic aptitude, which span 1946 to 2014, and discovered that the rank order of cognitive skills of various majors and degree holders has remained remarkably constant for the last seven decades.”

“This analysis uses five independent measures and samples of academic aptitude at different points in time—which include everything from tests of cognitive abilities to tests of academic achievement—showing these findings replicate and are quite robust.”

Most teaching schools emphasize postmodern pedagogies, focusing on technique. Few focus on advancing personal knowledge in Shakespeare, higher math, hard sciences, scientific inquiry, and classic sociology. They neglect age-old but proven methods that are making a comeback in home-based and private schools. Classical learning, based on the Trivium, is an easily understood model of child development that employs phonics, foundational arithmetic instruction, Latin, great literature, and cursive writing.

Training in reading instruction has declined due to the clash between Whole Language and Explicit Phonics. Initial instruction now focuses on such dubious techniques as “Balanced Literacy,” memorizing lists of sight words, three-cueing, invented spellings, placement levels, learning styles, “predictable” books, and, of course, “discovery” learning. Sometimes it is about mere guessing --- from pictures, initial letters, or whatever might make sense. Many education majors are never even exposed to reading science. Almost none know how to use basic, explicit phonics instruction.

At least for the last 10 years, teaching colleges have been pushing critical theory, leftist activism, and LGBTQ catechism. The emphasis on racial and “gender” issues has long supplanted the importance of character development. Academic success is now less about merit and more about “equity.”

This is seen in their selection of textbooks like *Learning for a Diverse World: Using Critical Theory to Read and Write about Literature*, by Michigan professor Lois Tyson. Critical theory covers many areas, including Marxist, feminist, racist, and LGBTQ theories. The chapters explain the oppressed-oppressor model of each and outline how literature should be re-interpreted and taught to students through the lens of critical theory.

I S S U E 3 :
TEACHER CERTIFICATION



In order to teach in government schools, teachers must meet state certification requirements. Most states do not require certification for home and private school educators; however, some government-funded voucher programs do require certification.

As noted, certification is now integral to teaching colleges. Accordingly, it is impacted by the faulty models adopted by these institutions. Indoctrination in critical theory, leftist activism, and LGBTQ catechism rather than proven teaching methods is now what is certified.

Would-be teachers owning degrees from traditional colleges in actual subjects are not exempt from the indoctrination process; they, too, must bear the cost in time and expense to get certified. In this way, the process becomes a toll-position against aspiring teachers with traditional values. Are certified teachers, then, better? Ed Next conducted a study on this question. The periodical found that ...

... some New York City teachers are considerably better than others at helping students. For example, [primary-level kids] whose teachers perform in the top quartile ... [score] 33 percent [higher] in math ... than students whose teachers perform in the bottom quartile. Yet as we embrace this piece of conventional wisdom, we must discard another: the widespread sentiment that there are large [disparities in efficacy] between traditionally certified teachers and uncertified or alternatively certified teachers.

The greatest potential for school districts to improve student achievement seems to rest not in regulating minimum qualifications for new teachers but in selectively retaining those teachers who are most effective.

Despite the lack of clear benefit, some states now seek to impose this ideological certification on home and private schools, especially through vouchers, ESA and other government-funded school choice legislation.

I S S U E 4 :
STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS



Formal standards by grade did not come to America until the 1980s. But after the release of the report *A Nation at Risk*, many observers asserted that grade-level standards with aligned assessments could keep students on track. Yet for centuries, if not a millennium, parents and educators intuited the phases of child development and tailored their teaching around reasoned expectations.

An analogy is seen in learning to walk. Most children toddle within a year, despite the absence of a written standard requiring them to do so. Some will walk sooner, and some later; none are “broken.” Some require more stages than others, but almost all kids learn to walk; those with genuine difficulties need therapy, not standards.

So also, with speech. Most kids speak by age two. If (by that age) they do not respond to cues, then their problem could be related to senses, cognition or perception. What they need is specialized intervention; standards do not “cure” their delay.

Historically, most kids could read by second grade, and nearly all could by the end of third grade. But in today’s government schools, only one in three, 33%, of fourth graders qualify as readers.

Standards, even if well-crafted and age-appropriate, are not applicable to all children. Kids develop at their own pace.

In her essay, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” Dorothy Sayers outlines a normal learning progression, in which educational guidelines acknowledge the uniqueness of each child while establishing realistic expectations. Sayers laments that government schools have lost this playbook.

Worse still, state standards in America remain based on Common Core, which was sold to educators, bureaucrats, and business leaders during Obama’s tenure. In his [well-considered essay](#), Thomas Armstrong identifies **12 flaws of the Common Core**. It ...

- 1.** Homogenizes learning
- 2.** Favors a top-down approach to reform
- 3.** Emphasizes skills when content should be emphasized
- 4.** Fuels the fragmentation of the learning process
- 5.** Has a notably elitist approach to learning
- 6.** Replaces traditional fiction reading with dispassionate non-fiction texts
- 7.** Denies flexibility to students in special education
- 8.** Nudges teachers to “teach to the test”
- 9.** Obliges teaching in developmentally inappropriate ways, especially during the early years
- 10.** Discriminates against students in low socio-economic regions
- 11.** Did not consult field-experienced educators in order to set standards
- 12.** Affirms bureaucratic attitudes toward learning and teaching

State-sponsored assessments are nothing new. High-school exams in New York as early as 1878 targeted algebra, American history, Latin, natural philosophy, and geography. By 1911, the list included Spanish, Hebrew, Italian, biology, economics, business math and law, commercial writing, typing, and, in music, harmony, counterpoint, and acoustics. Finally, the history of education itself was added. These assessments were administered as exit exams from high school.

In the 1950s, standardized tests like Iowa Basic Skills and California Achievement came into use. School districts employed them primarily to evaluate the success of schools rather than to target it for individual children. Furthermore, test anxiety was a parental concern from the start.

Next up was the No Child Left Behind Act, signed into law by President Bush in 2002. It aimed to improve public primary and secondary schools and student performance through accountability for schools, school districts, and states. The Act mandated that states assess reading and math annually for all kids in grades 3 through 8, and at least once in high school. Each school had to report on the performance of different groups (including racial minorities) and show measurable proficiency by 2014. Despite this rigorous methodology, the stated goals were not achieved, and a significant number of children were left behind.

For their part, home and private schools employ traditional assessments (e.g., Classical Learning Tests), but they use them as supports to teaching efforts with no negative impact on kids. Some states, in a push toward “accountability,” now demand that home and private schools administer assessments. But given the deplorable achievement of government schools, it does not appear that mandatory assessments improve student achievement.

I S S U E 5 : **TEACHERS’ UNIONS**



The National Education Association (NEA) was the first teachers’ union founded by forty-three educators in 1857 in Philadelphia. Its official mission statement was “to elevate the character and advance the interest of the profession of teaching, and to promote the cause of popular education in the United States.”

In 1916 in Chicago, Margaret Haley and others launched the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) to mobilize female teachers to fight for better pay, benefits and working conditions. Over time, membership has fluctuated. But the AFT and the NEA now count 70 percent of government school teachers, or **3.2 million**. These, along with state-level unions, are powerful lobbies that today lean heavily toward leftist policies and Democratic politicians.

According to [Public Union Facts](#), the NEA spent \$245 million in 2024 political contributions. The AFT ponied up more than \$99 million. The NEA supports Common Core and opposes vouchers. The AFT focuses on maintaining occupational privilege for teachers, as well as tenure policies that protect bad teachers. Teacher unions rally in support of LGBTQ+ policies, including placing inappropriate books in school libraries and classrooms, hiding gender issues of students from parents, protecting teachers who dress up pretending to be the opposite sex and other policies offensive to many parents.

Teacher unions are legal in most states in the United States, but their rights and the extent of their activities vary widely. For example, in Texas, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia and South Carolina, collective bargaining was entirely prohibited for government employees as of 2014.

In some states, teachers have the right to strike, while in others, such actions are illegal or significantly limited. As of 2014, only eleven states explicitly give teachers the right to strike or engage in collective bargaining. In right-to-work states, employees may be allowed to strike, but the power of unions to compel them to join is often limited. Virginia's recent legislation, which allows teachers to collectively bargain, reflects a broader trend of legal recognition for teacher unions in many states. This change is seen as a major victory for labor advocates.

As indicated previously, the policies and practices these teacher unions advocate are exactly the policies and practices that prevent government schools from improving student achievement in reading, writing and math.

CONCLUSION:



USPIE believes that government schools are irredeemable.

- ▶ Government involvement has created an expensive, bloated system that does not educate children.
- ▶ Colleges of Education and the current installed base of teachers do not know how to effectively teach reading, writing or math.
- ▶ Teacher certification demands that qualified professionals be indoctrinated in the ineffective teaching practices taught by Colleges of Education.
- ▶ State standards and assessments are inappropriate, ineffective and stand in the way of actual student achievement.
- ▶ Teacher unions are a powerful entity advocating for teacher rights over student learning to the detriment of children.
- ▶ In total, these roadblocks prevent the improvement of government schools in the near future.

Parents should remove their children from government schools by any means necessary. The government should get out of education to the degree possible. We urge parents to seek schooling options that are free of government funding. Local leaders can help by supporting homeschools or by making donations to private schools to fund scholarships.

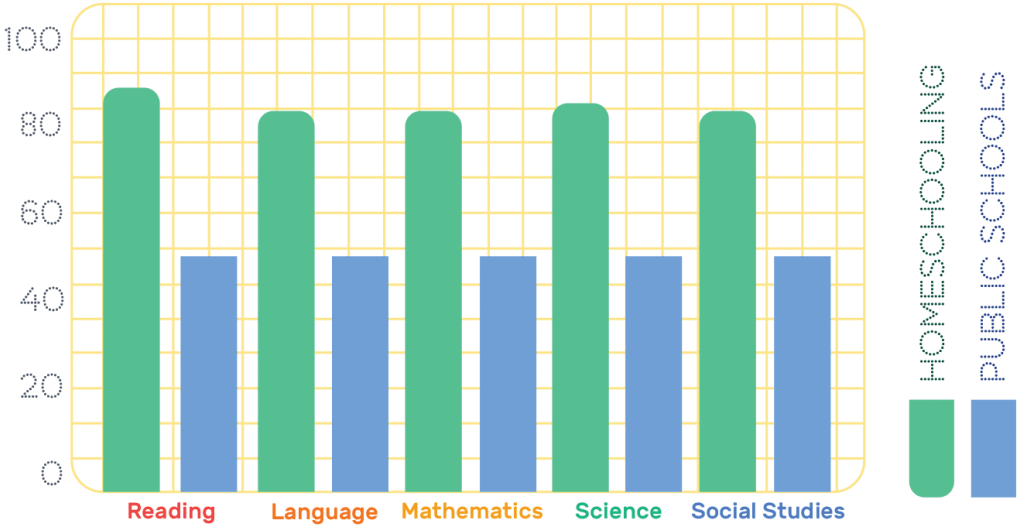
As more families exit public schools, legislators should make their funding reflect their enrollment; this model subjects government schools to free-market competition with non-government schools and reduces taxes for all citizens.

Parents are well-positioned to hold schools accountable. As they make choices, the better systems will accumulate enrollments and garner income, while the failing ones will see reductions.

Some worry that without government oversight, home and private schools will not adequately educate kids. But, again, parents, not bureaucrats, have the say in how to educate their children appropriately.

Moreover, although not all homeschoolers report standardized test results, anecdotal evidence from universities and employers consistently affirms the readiness of homeschooled children.

National Average Percentile Scores: Public Schools vs. Homeschools



Source: <https://brighterly.com/blog/homeschooling-statistics/>



To begin to create an education system in America that works, Congress should:

- ▶ Close the Federal Department of Education and eliminate all federal education mandates as defined in the [USPIE Blueprint to Close USED](#).
- ▶ In the short term, Congress should permit states that are reducing their reliance on federal education funds to establish a state tax deduction in the model of the existing State and Local Tax (SALT) deductions.
- ▶ As the federal education programs are eliminated, Congress should reduce income tax rates commensurate with the reduction of education spending through:
 - An overall reduction in income tax rates
 - An increase in the child tax deduction to benefit families.

State-level elected officials should:

- ▶ Ensure homeschooling and private schooling are protected and free to operate independently from government intervention.
- ▶ Eliminate all reliance on federal education dollars using the [USPIE Blueprint to Establish State Control of Education](#).
- ▶ Eliminate all voucher and ESA programs and replace them with a child tax deduction whereby parents check a box on their state income tax indicating their children do not attend public school. USPIE asserts that these government-funded school choice options will drive most of the problematic policies and practices outlined in this paper into home and private schools. A means must be developed to allow parents to keep their own money, not a means to give them government handouts.
- ▶ Realign all government school funding to a per-pupil basis, eliminating all grants or other funding that is based on anything other than per-pupil allowance.
- ▶ Continue to assess government schools in reading and math, safety, and other state-level concerns.

State leaders who want to create an environment that could assist the government schools interested in improving learning for children and attracting families could address many of the problems that exist. **States could:**

- ▶ Restrict earmarks on funds and allow school leadership to determine how monies are spent.
- ▶ Reduce the influence of teacher colleges and unions on government schools. Solutions could include alternate certifications and Right-to-Work models.
- ▶ Adopt pre-Common Core standards and assessments that proved effective for all students for math and reading, like those from Massachusetts.
- ▶ Eliminate regulations established by State Boards of Education that interfere with a school's operational prerogatives.
- ▶ Establish a conservative approach to School Board training in effective school leadership to promote student achievement.

IN CLOSING:



Parents are the first, best educators of their children. This is not just a slogan, not just a throw-away campaign line. It is a fundamental law. Elected officials must embrace this truth, resist the temptation to govern education, and return control to the only people properly positioned to hold educators and the education system accountable, parents.

MISSION STATEMENT



US Parents Involved in Education is a nonprofit, nationwide coalition that seeks to return education to its proper local roots and restore parental authority over their children's education by helping parents and local communities to escape federal and other national influences.

It is the vision of USPIE to create a culture where parents, empowered with the authority to choose what and how their children learn, are the undisputed primary educators of their children; where local schools operate in support of families, and where education is unencumbered by federal mandates.

